# Meeting the Gulf of Mexico Program's Shellfish Challenge

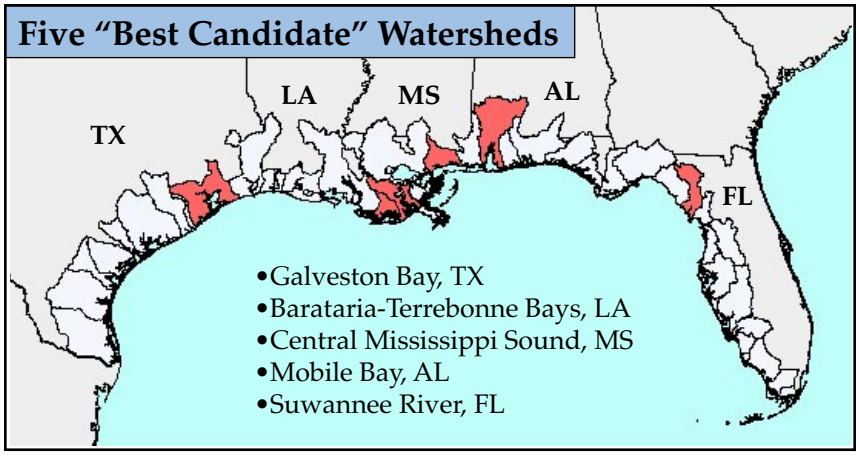
## Moving from Strategic Assessment to Implementation

**Project Update, July 1996**

*The goal of the Gulf of Mexico Program's Shellfish Challenge Project is to increase Gulf shellfish beds available for safe harvest by 10 percent. Over the past year, the Program has brought together Federal, state, and local stakeholders to examine the nature of the problems causing harvest limitations of shellfish growing waters, and to identify solutions on a regional scale. The next step is to translate these regional strategies into action within priority watersheds. Building partnerships to promote shellfish restoration is an important part of the Program's mission: to manage and protect the Gulf of Mexico, its communities and upland areas in ways that are consistent with the region's economic well-being.*

### Strategic Assessment to Implementation

The Gulf of Mexico Program has completed the strategic assessment phase of the Shellfish Challenge Project, resulting in the development of over 30 shellfish restoration strategies. By targeting watersheds where these strategies have the greatest potential for being successfully implemented, the Program moves closer to the implementation phase of the Challenge. In the next phase of the Project, Shellfish Restoration Implementation Planning Projects will be conducted in several "best candidate" watersheds during the next two years. The objective of these studies is to evaluate the feasibility of implementing a mix of priority shellfish restoration strategies that together will begin to meet the multiple objectives of the Shellfish Challenge.




### Why Conduct Implementation Planning Projects?

Implementation Planning Projects will be conducted to develop and demonstrate a process that will translate the Gulf-wide plan into focused shellfish restoration efforts at the state and local level.

### Selecting the Watersheds

In April 1996, the Gulf Program Office nominated five watersheds as candidates to initiate the planning projects. The selection process utilized the results of the strategic assessment process, and gave preference to those watersheds rated as best candidates for the greatest number of "top" restoration strategies. Other criteria considered in the selection process included the total number of strategies targeted for the watershed, transferability of the strategies to other watersheds, existing management programs, relative shellfish abundance, number and classification of growing waters, potential for improvement of the shellfish resource, and the number of ongoing restoration projects within the watershed.

### Nominated Watersheds

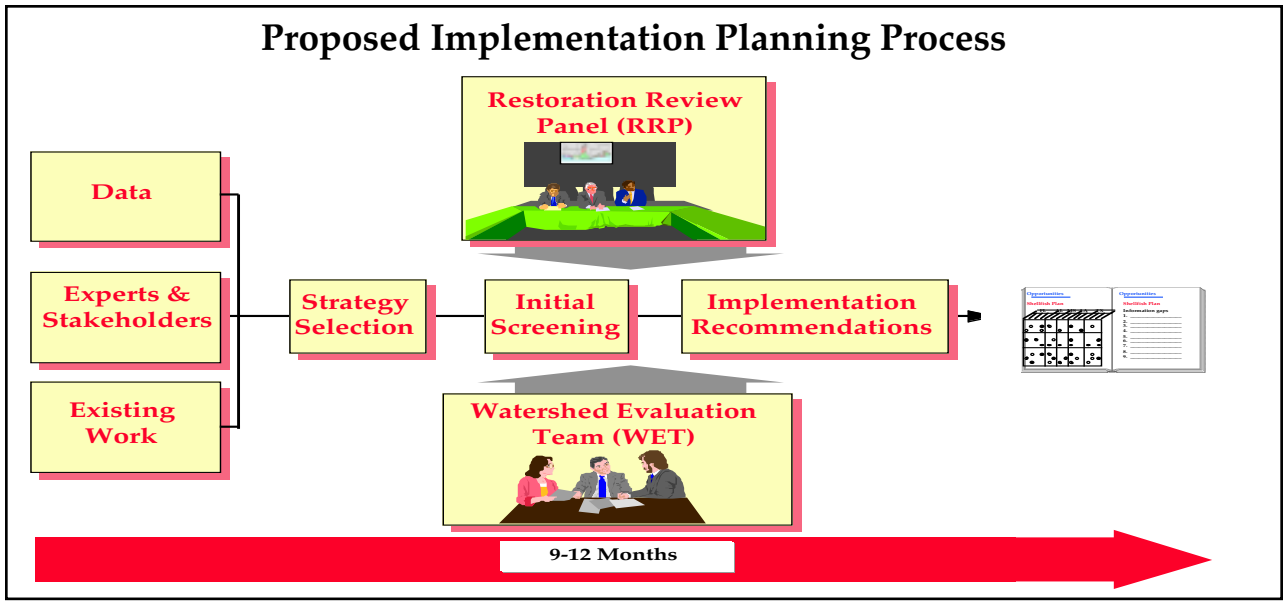
The five watersheds nominated were: Galveston Bay, TX; Barataria-Terrebonne Bays, LA; Central Mississippi Sound, MS; Mobile Bay, AL; and Suwannee River, FL.

### Program Strategy

The first planning project will begin in the Barataria-Terrebonne watershed in Louisiana in July 1996. Projects are scheduled in Mississippi and Alabama in late 1996, with projects in Texas and Florida slated to begin in 1997.

## Project Plan

The major elements of the planning process are shown in the diagram below. Two groups will play important roles in the Project. The first group is the Watershed Evaluation Team (WET). This team will be comprised of state liaisons representing key state agencies involved in shellfish management issues, and staff from the Gulf of Mexico Program Office and NOAA's Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) Division. As the Project's "analytic engine," the WET will organize meetings; collect, synthesize, and present data; and prepare the final summary report.




The second important group is the Restoration Review Panel (RRP). The RRP will serve as an advisory board, providing guidance to the WET in identifying the most feasible combination of shellfish restoration strategies targeted to specific shellfish growing waters. The RRP will be comprised of senior individuals representing stakeholder interests in government, citizens groups, and the shellfishing industry. While the membership on the RRP will be kept to a manageable size, representatives from all interested stakeholders will be encouraged to attend RRP meetings to ensure that their concerns are being addressed.

## The Barataria - Terrebonne Project

The Barataria - Terrebonne system in Louisiana was selected for the first implementation project because it ranked among the highest of the selected watersheds for the five top shellfish strategies. Also, because the Barataria - Terrebonne system is part of EPA's National Estuary Program, a substantial amount of the information needed for the implementation project has already been assembled and an institutional infrastructure exists which will greatly facilitate actual restoration.

## Next Steps

Over the next two months, the project team will focus on several tasks:

- Assessing the availablity of existing data layers that could be utilized in targeting growing waters for restoration;
- Bringing together the appropriate Federal, state, local, and industry representatives to form the WET and RRP, and;
- Working with state officials and other stakeholders to better understand the analytic capabilities and information that should be incorporated in the design of the Shellfish Restoration Potential Screening Tool.

The next Shellfish Project Update will describe in greater detail the development of the Shellfish Restoration Potential Screening Tool utilized in the Barataria - Terrebonne system.

## For More Information

For more information on meeting the Shellfish Challenge, contact Fred Kopfler, Gulf of Mexico Program Chief, Science and Technology (EPA), 601/688-2712; or Daniel Farrow, Chief, Pollution Sources Characterization Branch, NOAA SEA Division , 301/713-3000 x156.